

Virginia Commission for the Arts
December 3, 2009
Minutes
The Prizery, South Boston

Members Present: Nick Covatta, Chair; Lisa Alderman, Willie Dell, Tina Lea, Sharron Miller, Evelia Gonzalez Porto, Ann Edwards Rust, Marcia Speck, Marcia Thalhimer, Ann Bondurant Trinkle, Vaughan Webb, and Deborah Wyld

Members Absent: Gwen Everett

Staff Present: Peggy Baggett, Foster Billingsley, Elizabeth Cantile, and Cathy Welborn

Guests: Alan Albert, Legislative Counsel, Virginians for the Arts

Introduction

Chair Nick Covatta called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m. Peggy Baggett introduced new Commission member Sharron Kitchen Miller and then reviewed the agenda. Nick Covatta, noting that a major portion of the meeting would be the advocacy workshop, talked about the Commissioners as the voice for the arts statewide and the need to show leadership in the advocacy effort.

Peggy Baggett then introduced Chris Jones, Executive Director of The Prizery. Mr. Jones welcomed the Commission to South Boston and to The Prizery, expressing gratitude for both the funding and the guidance provided to The Prizery by the Commission.

Vaughan Webb made a motion to approve the minutes of the October 6, 2009, Commission meeting. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

Overview of State Budget Situation

Peggy Baggett reviewed the status of the state budget and the timeline for review and approval of the 2010-12 budget, as well as amendments to the current year's budget. She noted that the outlook for state revenues is not good in the near future. She stated that no firm decisions can be made on the Commission grant budget until the General Assembly has completed its work on the 2010-12 state budget in the spring.

Report of Policy/Planning/Budget Committee

Vaughan Webb reported on the recommendations of the Policy/Planning/Budget Committee which met on November 18. The Policy Committee had reviewed the responses from the field to the survey on Commission programs and services. It was clear all of the Commission grant programs are of value to the field.

One of the topics for consideration by the Policy Committee was which grant programs, if

any, should be suspended until the budget situation improves. The Committee members agreed that it is important to keep in mind the Commission goal of making the arts more widely available to the public. In addition, the Committee members wanted to provide ways for the Commission to continue funding arts organizations that do not qualify for General Operating Support.

Because the Commission will not be printing the guidelines for funding, due to state restrictions on printing, the Commission does not have to adopt two year guidelines but can announce the grants programs for 2010-11 only. The guidelines will be posted on the Commission website by the first of January. No decisions will be made on the funding levels until the state budget is adopted.

The Policy Committee recommended the following for the grant programs.

- Continue General Operating Support although the total amount will probably be reduced
- Continue Services to the Field. It was noted that although most of the projects funded in this category would be eligible in the Project Grant category, it is difficult for the applicants to compete against projects that are focused on providing art experiences for the public. Preserving Services to the Field enables the Commission to support critical administrative functions for arts organizations.
- Continue Special Recognition grants although the Commission should be cautious about adding new groups to this type of funding
- Continue Technical Assistance but exclude General Operating Support grantees from eligibility. This change would enable the Commission to focus on support new and emerging arts organizations even with reduced funding in this category.
- Suspend Technology Enhancement Grants for at least 2010-11. It was noted that the eligible applicants are the General Operating Support grantees so these grants, although valuable, do not expand the availability of the arts.
- Continue Local Government Challenge Grants although the Commission may not be able to fully fund these applications for the next few years.
- Continue Project Grants but limit the eligible activities to operating support for new and emerging arts organizations, commissions of new work, new or expanded arts education programs, and new or expanded performances and exhibitions.
- Continue the performing arts touring program.
- Suspend Artist Fellowships for at least another year. These grants are invaluable to the artists and the only way that the Commission provides direct support to individual artists. However, these grants serve only a handful of artists each year and do not provide the impact of other grant programs in making the arts more widely available.
- Continue the Writers in Virginia grants which are a means of showing support for writers.
- Continue the Artist Residency Grants
- The Policy Committee affirmed the decision made in the spring of 2009 to eliminate the Teacher Incentive Grants. It was noted that the plan in the spring called for adding the money that would have been spent on the Teacher Incentive Grants to an expanded Artist Residency grant program but with the budget restrictions it will not be possible to expand the Artist Residency program.
- Continue sponsorship of the Art Works for Virginia conference.
- Continue the Tourism & the Arts grants at a reduced funding level. It is critical to maintain the partnership with the Virginia Tourism Corporation.

- Continue the Local Arts Agencies Professional Development although it was noted that, depending on funds, the Commission may have to reduce its funding for the spring workshop.

Other changes in the guidelines recommended by the Policy Committee include raising the budget minimum for the audit requirement to \$600,000 for at least two consecutive years and raising the maximum grant request in General Operating Support to \$200,000.

In the discussion about the Policy Committee recommendations the following points were made.

- All of the Commission grant programs provide a valuable service, and suspending any of the programs is painful.
- The General Operating Support grants provide the type of unrestricted funding that is most difficult to raise from the private sector. In addition, the first payments on these grants are made when many arts organizations are experiencing the slowest cash flow of the year. Although the amount of these grants will likely be reduced again in the next fiscal year, it is important for the Commission to preserve these grants as much as possible.
- The Commission should strike a balance between preserving funding to established organizations while still finding ways to help organizations not eligible for General Operating Support.
- There is a need to strengthen the Commission role in arts education, but the resources to do so will not be available in the near future.
- There was concern from several Commissioners that raising the maximum request in the General Operating Support grant program would reduce funding for the smaller arts organizations of the state.

Vaughan Webb then made a motion to approve the Policy Committee recommendation to suspend the Teacher Incentive Grants indefinitely. The motion was seconded and approved, 12-Yes, 1-No.

Vaughan Webb made a motion to approve the Policy Committee recommendations on the rest of the grant programs. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

Ann Edwards Rust made a motion to approve the Policy Committee recommendation on raising the budget minimum for the audit requirement. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

Deborah Wyld made a motion to approve the Policy Committee recommendation on the maximum grant request for General Operating Support. The motion was seconded and approved, 12-Yes, 1-No.

Updates

Peggy Baggett reported on the financial status of the Virginia Symphony, progress on the Minds Wide Open statewide initiative, the 2010 Art Works for Virginia conference, and the Arts Build Communities Awards.

There was a discussion of the Virginia Heritage Awards. The Commissioners who attended the presentation ceremony agreed that the Awards were a success with an outstanding group of winners. There was agreement that the Awards brought attention to art forms that get little public recognition, as well as providing good visibility for the Commission.

Membership in the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation

There was a discussion of the benefits of continued membership in the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation. Concern was expressed that there is no representative from Virginia on the board of directors. There was consensus that there is a good dollar return on the investment of Commission dues at the present time but that the Commission should carefully monitor the use of the funds.

Advocacy Workshop

Peggy Baggett introduced Alan Albert, Legislative Counsel to Virginians for the Arts, who presented an overview of the state budgeting process and strategies for effective advocacy.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2 p.m. for a tour of The Prizery.